

3 1761 07436848 1

Greenwood, Francis William  
Pitt

Milton's English prose  
works

PR  
3581  
G74



cautious and thorough investigation, and then to prosecute it to a completion, if within the compass of their means. As a great national work, we shall feel much interest in seeing it brought to a successful termination, and shall probably have occasion to notice hereafter the inquiries which, in the course of the summer, are to be pursued, both at home and abroad, in reference to it.

After witnessing the many triumphs of science in the present age, we confess we are more inclined to confide in speculations reasonable in themselves, and to hope that railroads may add as largely to the facilities of commerce, as canals have done before them. It is certain, at least, that if this large enterprise of Baltimore be brought to a happy issue, its benefits will be of the first importance, not to that mart alone, but to the general commerce of the country; and in this latter point of view it highly merits attention from the government of the union.

---

ART. IV.—*A Selection from the English Prose Works of*  
JOHN MILTON. In two vols. 12mo. Boston. Bowles  
& Dearborn. 1826.

THE prose writings of Milton, though they have been praised and recommended by a few who have felt their astonishing power and beauty, are yet but little known among us. We hope, however, that this will not long be the case; and that the excellent edition by Mr Jenks, of which the title stands at the head of this article, will enable many to read the prose of a man with whose poetry they have long been familiar—prose, we will venture to say, hardly inferior to his poetry. As Americans, as lovers of freedom, improvement, and truth, we wish to see these two volumes widely circulated among our countrymen, and deeply read. They are fit manuals for a free people. They are full of those eloquent, soul stirring, holy lessons of liberty, which do something more than simply persuade and convince the mind; which give it purpose, and principle, and firm resolve; which brace up the heart, while they strengthen the understanding; which render timidity or apostacy impossible; which, at the same time that they impart the feeling of discipleship, infuse the spirit of martyrdom:

PR

3581

G 74



864603 -

because the truths which they inculcate are of such a nature, that those who receive them must contend, and if needs be, must die for them. Therefore it is that we earnestly desire to see the prose works of John Milton generally disseminated; and that we hail with pleasure and gratitude every attempt to make them known. When they are known, it cannot be but that they will produce their impression, and be estimated by many, as they are now estimated by a few, according to their real value.

For ourselves, we can truly say that we never knew Milton, till we were acquainted with his prose writings. We never knew the man till then; never felt how entirely and supremely he was a poet, or, to use his own words, 'a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things.' We never knew till then, what a noble, highminded being, what a contemner of littleness and baseness, what a fearless asserter of right and denouncer of wrong, how pure, how virtuous, how incorruptible, how unconquerable he was. How truly the modern poet speaks of him, when he says; 'His soul was as a star, and dwelt apart.' When we now compare him with his brother stars, we perceive that he has indeed his own separate heaven, where he shines alone, and not to be approached. If we grant that in the single respect of genius he was second to Shakspeare, and to him alone would we grant him to be second, yet what was Shakspeare's life? what were his occupations, studies, principles? We know nothing of them; they made no impression on the world; they have passed away, and left us no trace; they have procured no respect for the man. We think of Shakspeare's poetry, and not of Shakspeare. His name comes to us as a voice, an abstraction, a beautiful sound. But the name of Milton is inseparably united with the man himself; with the image of his life; with his studious, blameless, brilliant youth; with his diligent, useful, resolute manhood; with his unbroken and undaunted, though blind and neglected old age; with learning, various, profound, unrivalled; with opinions really liberal, and republican; with convictions which no fear nor flattery could shake; with principles which grew up from the very roots of truth. We will not proceed with other comparisons, which readily suggest themselves to us. They may be pursued by those who are sensible that genius of mind alone ranks far below what may be called genius of life; genius of mind united in admira-



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
University of Toronto

ble consistency with genius of action, genius of purpose, and genius of heart.

There is another thing with which the prose writings of Milton brought us acquainted. We never knew, till we read them, the whole power of our mother tongue. Let him who would understand how rich, how copious, how forcible the English language is, study the prose of Milton, and make himself familiar with his style; but let him not attempt to imitate, let him not hope to equal the master, unless he feel within himself the master's gifts and the master's soul.

But if such is the prose of the great poet, how happens it that it is not more generally known? How happens it that this magazine of just and noble thoughts, high imaginations, and burning words, has been in a manner shut up and unvisited? How happens it, that while the *Paradise Lost* has been printed in every form and size, in editions without number, for the rich and for the poor, illustrated by the artist, and furnished with notes and commentaries by distinguished scholars, as if it were an ancient classic, that the *Areopagitica*, *The Reason of Church Government*, *The Animadversions*, have been rarely published, and sparingly read?

The two principal reasons of the want of popularity of Milton's prose works, have been usually stated, and truly, to be the peculiarities of their style, and the nature and management of their topics. Of their style we shall say a few words by and by. Of their topics, and the management of them, in which the great cause of their unpopularity is decidedly to be found, we shall speak at once, and more at length.

The prose writings, then, of Milton, are all, both Latin and English, with only one or two exceptions, strictly, and many would say, bitterly controversial. They are theological and political controversies. They wear, therefore, a formidable and forbidding aspect to the generality of readers; for controversy is not a favorite kind of reading; it requires more thought and a more severe and constant exercise of judgment, candor, patience, and equanimity, than most people are willing or able to bestow and apply; it is rarely conducted by the disputants without more or less asperity; it has acquired a bad name; it is called, by distinction, a thorny path; and many think they cannot walk in it without danger to their faces and their clothes, and therefore they decline it with terror and aversion. Now we profess ourselves to be great friends of controversy. We





regard it with respect and favor, if not absolutely with love. If it is not a pleasant and flowery way, it is the direct road to light and knowledge; and if so, why do we talk about thorns, as if we expected to reach any of the supreme and permanent blessings of life, treading all the distance on turf and roses? We are glad that the glorious bard made it his adopted path, and that he pursued it with so untired, so forward, and so firm a step. We would not have had him write on any other subjects but those, which not only singularly involved the destinies of England at the period of his writing, but are inseparably connected with the present, future, lasting welfare of the world. He was peculiarly fitted to elicit and establish truth by controversy; which we are persuaded is its proper, and almost its peculiar office. For the confirmation of this sentiment, we will take the liberty of offering our reasons.

False teachers will arise in all ages, and deceive many; some of them intending to deceive, and others having no such intention. Dreams will be announced as realities, and believed as such; and realities will be scouted as dreams. There is such a perpetual warfare between truth and error in the world, that the old Manichean notion of two great opposing principles of good and evil, who, with their kingdoms of light and darkness, are engaged in constant and tremendous battle, would be little more than an accurate account of the real state of things, if it were stripped of its personifications and oriental imagery. There is a battle between good and evil; there is a struggle between the powers of light and darkness. Knowledge and virtue are in perpetual conflict with ignorance and vice; and whatever advantages the former may from time to time gain over the latter, the latter are mighty antagonists, who will no doubt maintain the contest obstinately and long.

If the champions of error would in all cases avow themselves to be so; if they would write their name and their purpose on their banners, and send an open defiance, like him of Gath, against the armies of the living God, the contest might be brought to a more certain and speedy issue; but there are few of them who do not profess, either sincerely or insincerely, to be on the side of truth and virtue; and thus they become doubly mischievous, by being disguised, and occasion the double necessity of unmasking and overcoming them. Many teachers of what is false and of a pernicious tendency, are as honest as it is possible for self-deceiving humanity to be. They are the first, and



most thorough believers of their own dreams; and are fully persuaded that they are dreaming for the cause of truth and the general welfare. The same honest language is held by those who are not actuated by the same pure motives; by those who uphold falsehood for the sake of their own private interests, or through the incitement of their bad passions, but do not confess the influence which guides and sways them, because they know that interest and passion, however powerful in themselves, are worse than powerless when presented as arguments to others; for he who wishes to be heard with the least patience by his neighbor, must appear to be anxious for his neighbor's good, not merely careful of his own. Tyrants talk of the safety of the state, and the happiness of their people, without saying much about the sweets of absolute power, and the indulgence of all their appetites and luxurious wishes. Indeed, it is not unfrequently the case that interest is louder in its professions of disinterestedness than is disinterestedness itself; for virtue is modest, and hypocrisy is bold; and a part that is acted is likely to be overacted.

To detect error is to overthrow it. But the most desperate antagonists of truth will not allow that they are in the wrong, or, in other words, that they are attacking what really is truth. The world is filled with falsehood, which never calls itself by that name. The diversities of human intellect and feeling, and the influences of education, habit, and passion, give rise to innumerable errors, which agree together in two points, in being of a bad tendency, and in assuming the name of truth. On the one hand is falsehood, which thinks itself to be truth; and on the other hand is falsehood, which is resolved, if possible, to be thought so too, whatever it may think itself. Hence come theories, systems, and plans, varying from each other, and from truth in different degrees; and, just in proportion as they vary from truth, conducing to unhappiness, if not immediately, yet in their remote effects. Wrong opinions and views tend to wrong conduct, and wrong conduct seeks to defend or excuse itself by maintaining plausible and nicely worded opinions. These are the consequences, natural and inevitable, of human freedom and human imperfection, the bitter fruits of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, plucked from the beginning, and harshly infused into the mingled cup of life. Men are in a state of discipline; and these are the weaknesses, disorders, and rebellions of their pupilage. They are in training



for that heavenly harmony which is the end of the Divine government ; and these are the sad discords of their inexperience and perverseness, which break in upon the universal melody, and disturb the pure song of the stars.

Surrounded on all sides by bad principles, false opinions, and doubtful disputations, what then is the duty of the sincere, serious, impartial lover of truth? What is his duty, in view of the evils which result from erroneous doctrines, and in regard to those who inculcate them? It plainly consists in moral courage and intrepidity ; in affording a fair and fearless audience to all propositions, and advancing a faithful avowal and defence of his own convictions of truth. To enjoin silence by authority, or attempt to enforce it by penalties, on those who would proclaim their free thoughts, whether for good or evil, is not only a fruitless, but an unwise and an unrighteous expedient. The endeavor to suppress presumed error by physical power, is itself an error of uncommon magnitude ; as great as any which it would suppress ; and one which the world is beginning to get rid of, by that best of all methods of suppression, consent and dearly bought experience. Opinions are like certain plants, which thrive, and spread, and weave their roots more firmly together, by being trodden upon and used roughly. The basket which the Corinthian woman set upon the young acanthus, was speedily overtopped and hidden by the rank and resolute leaves which sprung up from beneath it. There is a pride in man which always rises against pressure ; and a sympathy in man which takes the part of an oppressed brother. Besides, to punish error is only to proclaim it, and to proclaim without refuting it. Punishment cannot reach the silent and secret thoughts of men ; but that which is punished may ; and that which is received in secret, will secretly make its progress, undermining and destroying, like a poison without its antidote ; for mere force, or mere denunciation, is no antidote for the mind.

The only way to deal with error is, to meet it, face to face ; to examine it critically, feature by feature ; to question it boldly, and to answer it fairly. To fly from it, is to tempt it to advance. To fear it, is to acknowledge its power, and to increase it ; to wrong, moreover, the power of truth ; to misapprehend the very nature of truth ; to doubt the reality of its existence, the divinity of its origin, and the strength and durability of its foundations ; to give up the world to the dominion



of darkness, and the reign of the evil principle ; to deny, practically, that there is anything progressive in intellect, or useful in investigation, or conclusive in reason, or attainable in knowledge. What is it that we fear ? Do we fear that God has so constituted the human mind, in relation to whatever is made to concern it, or come before it, that it has no final ability to discern between what is good and what is bad ; what is stable and what is fleeting ; what is and what is not ? Do we fear that our Creator has ordained such an affinity between error and the rational part of those whom we are constrained to call his rational creatures, that the two agree more constantly, and always will agree more constantly and lovingly together, than will the latter and truth ? Do we fear that error will naturally bear examination more steadfastly and successfully than truth ? or that the human mind necessarily supports what is false, with more ease and vigor than what is real ? or that those minds which espouse the cause of evil, are constantly stronger than those which take the good side ? or that vice is portioned with such convincing arguments, that virtue cannot answer them ? Do we fear these things ? Do we apprehend that this is the course and order of the moral world ? Then ought our life to be one perpetual fear ; we should fear the government of the universe, and the dispensations of eternity.

But if we do not fear that man is made more capable and susceptible of error than of truth, and that error is endowed from above with a permanent superiority here below, then error is not to be feared, but to be faced and opposed. If there is any falsehood which should terrify us, it is that which lives in our own houses, and speaks from our own hearts ; and even that, perhaps, is to be handled severely rather than timidly ; but that which comes from without, as it must come, and there is no help for it, so let it come. Let the prophet that hath a dream, tell his dream ; let us hear it, and know what it is, so that it may be found to be a dream, and no reality. So long as men will proclaim their fancies, and other men will hear them, let them unburthen themselves ; and let them not disperse their spurious ware abroad, till it has undergone its inspection, and received its brand. Error is a disease incident to humanity ; and we cannot fly from it ; and as there are no means of general prevention, let it develope itself, that we may see it and trace it, and steadily administer its cure. Fear and ignorance go together ; and those who timidly shrink from error, are in the way of





losing the opportunity of much truth ; for truth is often descried by comparison, and the manifestation of that, which among many things presented, is the most worthy. By sifting the dust we discover the diamonds ; which, though hidden in the earth, and crusted over with earth, are diamonds still.

Let every ambitious imagination, therefore, take its own course, and come out and show itself. And let not its consequence be needlessly increased by a vain and unreasonable terror, which refuses to confront and rebuke it. It would be a pity, indeed, if all the zeal, and all the courage, and all the alertness, were to be exhibited on the wrong side, and cowardice and torpor alone were to be seen on the right.

At the same time that it is our duty, and also our policy, to be fearless in regarding error, it is our duty to be intrepid in declaring the truth. If truth is of any value, we should maintain it as if we valued it. If it is of any certain benefit to mankind, we should proclaim it, as the well wishers of our race. If it is the cause of Heaven, we should plead for it earnestly, as the partakers of a spiritual existence, and the heirs of immortality. If we believe that infinite wisdom and rectitude govern the world, we should join ourselves to its interests, and contend for its rights, as for the course which will finally and completely triumph. He who is convinced that he has the living word within his bosom, has no right to keep it shut up there, pining and drooping for air and light and action. It must go forth and do its work, which is to oppose every false invention of man, and bring it to trial and to condemnation. He who thinks that error and vice are destructive of the best interests of society, and of his own too, as connected with and forming a part of them, what has he to do, but to be the faithful advocate of religion and virtue, if he thinks that religion and virtue are contrary to error and vice, and to be preferred before them ? If a man has no settled principles of right, why does he talk about error, or even pretend to fear it ? Neither error nor truth is anything to him. But if he is possessed of settled principles, why does he suffer fear, or fashion, or any motive in the world, to shake his confidence, or prevent him from declaring his convictions ?

Even in questions which are called doubtful, because they divide honest and well meaning opinions, the lover of truth is to pursue the same course, whenever he has taken his side candidly and with understanding ; and he always will take his



side, as soon as he is satisfied that the subject is of sufficient importance to claim his decision. These questions generally grow less and less doubtful every day, the more they are examined and discussed, and the more liberally they are handled. Experience is a principal test of truth ; and as truth is founded on reality, or rather is reality itself, it will sooner or later be made manifest by that test. Sooner or later ; for in speaking of so long lived a thing as opinion, which dies not with one generation of men, but enjoys a spiritual and transmitted existence, we must not confine ourselves to short periods of time, but extend our view far behind and far before,—back even to the day when man was created, and forward to any limit within the bounds of probability. We are too apt to become impatient, when we cannot see favorite opinions confirmed in our own lifetime. Our own lifetime is but a moment ; is but a single beat of the pendulum which measures out the solemn and majestic progress of the ages. We must not attach so much importance to the period of our life. The epochs of mind and morals must be regarded in conjunction with the life of our world ; nor must even that life be considered as a long one, as it respects that part of it which is past. The days of its years have as yet, probably been few, in comparison with those which are still to be numbered. In the mean time, our lives, though short, compose the age of the world, and our labors and inquiries, by their accumulation, must bring about the world's improvement, and add, however gradually, to its experience. The duty involves a struggle, but it is not therefore to be avoided.

Thus thought Milton ; and as he thought, so he acted. Not the shadow of a doubt seems ever to have passed over his mind, of the worth and the might of truth ; and he scorned with a lofty indignation all aids to her cause, but those which were offered by God's good spirit, and man's free mind. ' For who knows not,' says he, ' that truth is strong, next to the Almighty ; she needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings, to make her victorious ; those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power ; give her but room, and do not bind her when she sleeps ; for then she speaks not true, as the old Proteus did, who spake oracles only when he was caught and bound.'

With these convictions, Milton never hesitated in his course. Living in a time of great mental as well as physical conflict



and distraction, and conscious of the talents which, like powerful engines of warfare, had been given into his trust, he plunged into the mid battle of political and theological controversy, as if it were at once his place and his privilege to contend for the rights of mankind. Though he loved peace, he loved truth more; he loved the souls of men; 'which is the dearest love, and stirs up to the noblest jealousy.' He preferred his duty before his rest. He knew the toil and danger which awaited him; but he knew also that he had taken his part in 'the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.' His great soul was in itself gentle and open as day, and in gentler times would not have appeared in so warlike a guise. He would willingly have framed his measures to the concords of peace; 'but,' to use again his own matchless speech, 'when God commands to take the trumpet, and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say, or what he shall conceal.' The voice of duty, and the testimony of conscience, were to him the command of God; he did take the trumpet, and blow a blast 'of which all Europe rang from side to side;' a blast which even yet is not silent, but has come echoing down from year to year to us of the present, and will still go sounding on, clear toned and thrilling, through the unknown depths of future time, and from region to region of the globe, till nations will hear and be roused up, that now are dead, and the heart of the whole world shall beat, like the heart of a single champion, at the summons of truth and liberty.

The two principal objects of Milton's attack, were the dignities, dogmas, and ceremonies of English prelacy and kingly forms of government. In his victorious career he met and overthrew all arguments from prescription, antiquity, and a false prudence and caution. He was awed by nothing human; he despised all temporizing and half-way expedients in matters of great moment, all timid recipes of confections and potherbs for violent and critical disorders; and he was not afraid of going too far in the direction of truth, or of announcing her dictates too boldly. We cannot, however, in any way give so clear an exposition of his polemical spirit and style, as by quoting some passages from his works. Our first extract shall be from that splendid tract, the '*Areopagitica*; a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing.' The paragraph, as will readily be seen, is an answer to the plea that an unrestricted



press becomes the source of schisms, and crowds of new and dangerous opinions.

‘ And what do they tell us vainly of new opinions, when this very opinion of theirs, that none must be heard but whom they like, is the worst and newest opinion of all others, and is the chief cause why sects and schisms do so much abound, and true knowledge is kept at distance from us; besides yet a greater danger which is in it. For when God shakes a kingdom, with strong and healthful commotions, to a general reforming, it is not untrue that many sectaries and false teachers are then busiest in seducing. But yet more true it is, that God then raises to his own work men of rare abilities and more than common industry, not only to look back and revise what hath been taught heretofore, but to gain further and to go on some new enlightened steps in the discovery of truth. For such is the order of God’s enlightening his church, to dispense and deal out by degrees his beam, so as our earthly eyes may best sustain it. Neither is God appointed and confined, where and out of what place these his chosen shall be first heard to speak; for he sees not as man sees, chooses not as man chooses, lest we should devote ourselves again to set places and assemblies, and outward callings of men, planting our faith one while in the old Convocation house, and another while in the chapel at Westminster, when all the faith and religion that shall be there canonized, is not sufficient without plain convincement, and the charity of patient instruction, to supple the least bruise of conscience, to edify the meanest Christian, who desires to walk in the spirit, and not in the letter of human trust, for all the number of voices that can be there made; no, though Harry the Seventh himself there, with all his liege tombs about him, should lend them voices from the dead, to swell their number. And if the men be erroneous who appear to be the leading schismatics, what withholds us but our sloth, our selfwill, and distrust in the right cause, that we do not give them gentle meetings and gentle dismissions, that we debate not and examine the matter thoroughly, with liberal and frequent audience, if not for their sakes, yet for our own? seeing no man who hath tasted learning, but will confess the many ways of profiting by those, who, not contented with stale receipts, are able to manage and set forth new positions to the world. And were they but as the dust and cinders of our feet, so long as in that notion they may yet serve to polish and brighten the armory of truth, even for that respect they were not utterly to be cast away. But if they be of those whom God hath fitted for the special use of these times with eminent and ample gifts, and those perhaps neither among the priests nor among the Pharisees, and we in the haste of a precip-





itant zeal shall make no distinction, but resolve to stop their mouths, because we fear they come with new and dangerous opinions, as we commonly forejudge them ere we understand them, no less than woe to us, while, thinking thus to defend the gospel, we are found the persecutors!' Vol. II. pp. 69, 70.

We are mistaken if our readers do not find some passages here, which could have flowed from but few pens beside that of the author of *Paradise-Lost*. Let us take another beautiful and indignant burst of eloquence from 'The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty.' He denies the power of the prelates to prevent schism; and while we are reading this passage, as well as others in which prelacy is mentioned and inveighed against, we must bear in mind what the establishment had been in the writer's time, and how little reason he had to view it with respect or indulgence.

'It was not the prevention of schism, but it was schism itself, and the hateful thirst of lording in the church, that first bestowed a being upon prelacy; this was the true cause, but the pretence is still the same. The prelates, as they would have it thought, are the only mauls of schism. Forsooth, if they be put down, a deluge of innumerable sects will follow; we shall be all Brownists, Familists, Anabaptists. For the word Puritan seems to be quashed, and all that heretofore were counted such, are now Brownists. And thus do they raise an evil report upon the expected reforming grace that God hath bid us hope for; like those faithless spies, whose carcasses shall perish in the wilderness of their own confused ignorance, and never taste the good of reformation. Do they keep away schism? If to bring a numb and chill stupidity of soul, an unactive blindness of mind upon the people by their leaden doctrine, or no doctrine at all; if to persecute all knowing and zealous Christians by the violence of their courts, be to keep away schism, they keep away schism indeed; and by this kind of discipline all Italy and Spain is as purely and politically kept from schism as England hath been by them. With as good a plea might the dead palsy boast to a man, It is I that free you from stitches and pains, and the troublesome feeling of cold and heat, of wounds and strokes; if I were gone, all these would molest you. The winter might as well vaunt itself against the spring; I destroy all noisome and rank weeds, I keep down all pestilent vapors; Yes, and all wholesome herbs, and all fresh dews, by your violent and hidebound frost; but when the gentle west winds shall open the fruitful bosom of the earth, thus overgirded by your imprisonment, then the flowers put forth and spring, and then the sun shall scatter the mists, and the manuring



hand of the tiller shall root up all that burdens the soil without thank to your bondage. But far worse than any frozen captivity is the bondage of prelates; for that other, if it keep down anything which is good within the earth, so doth it likewise that which is ill; but these let out freely the ill, and keep down the good, or else keep down the lesser ill, and let out the greatest.' Vol. 1. pp. 123, 124.

Again, to the same purpose is the following paragraph from the next chapter.

'As for those many sects and divisions rumored abroad to be amongst us, it is not hard to perceive that they are partly the mere fictions and false alarms of the prelates, thereby to cast amazements and panic terrors into the hearts of weaker Christians, that they should not venture to change the present deformity of the church, for fear of I know not what worse inconveniences. With the same objected fears and suspicions, we know that subtle prelate, Gardner, sought to divert the reformation. It may suffice us to be taught by St Paul, that there must be sects for the manifesting of those that are soundhearted. These are but winds and flaws to try the floating vessel of our faith, whether it be stanch and sail well, whether our ballast be just, our anchorage and cable strong. By this is seen who lives by faith and certain knowledge, and who by credulity and the prevailing opinion of the age; whose virtue is of an unchangeable grain, and whose of a slight wash. If God come to try our constancy, we ought not to shrink or stand the less firmly for that, but pass on with more steadfast resolution to establish the truth, though it were through a lane of sects and heresies on each side.' Vol. 1. p. 131.

But almost every page is alive with the same energy, and redolent of the same poetical fragrance. The style is warm, surely. Who would wish it cold? The expressions are glowing. How could they have been dull and dim, from such a man, in such a time, and against such opponents? But if apology were needed, who would ask a better than the following one, or who would refuse to accept it?

'And here withal I invoke the immortal Deity, revealer and judge of secrets, that wherever I have in this book plainly and roundly, though worthily and truly, laid open the faults and blemishes of fathers, martyrs, or Christian emperors, or have otherwise inveighed against error and superstition with vehement expressions; I have done it, neither out of malice, nor list to speak evil, nor any vainglory, but of mere necessity to vindicate the spotless truth from an ignominious bondage, whose native worth is now become of such a low esteem, that she is like to find



small credit with us for what she can say, unless she can bring a ticket from Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, or prove herself a retainer to Constantine, and wear his badge. More tolerable it were for the church of God, that all these names were utterly abolished like the brazen serpent, than that men's fond opinion should thus idolize them, and the heavenly truth be thus captivated.' Vol. i. p. 9.

We are aware, however, that a heavier charge can be brought and sustained against Milton, than the controversial nature of his writings, or the force and warmth of their language. That language is not only forcible and warm; it is occasionally intemperate and abusive, highly so. We may say, that it is not wonderful, that excited and exasperated as the political and religious independents of England had been, their writers should have revenged themselves by harsh and scurrilous retorts; but we cannot help a feeling of disappointment, that the spirit of Milton did not sustain itself above such a low species of contention.

Of the literary faults of his style, the principal seem to be, the Latin forms in which his sentences were often cast, and the almost interminable length to which many of them were drawn out. These, together with the tinge of antiquity which time has imparted to it, render his prose somewhat of a study to those who are not accustomed to the old writers. But the difficulty is no greater than a little practice will overcome; till at last the taste will be pleased with peculiarities which at first greatly offended, or at least perplexed it. We will here introduce a quotation from his 'Reason of Church Government,' in which his chief faults are exemplified. It consists of but one sentence, though we confess one of the longest, if not the longest in these volumes; and it is pretty well seasoned with abuse, though not with the worst which his writings furnish. If it did not also present much of his true and characteristic vigor and richness, we should not have exhibited its appalling dimensions to our readers. This, too, is an invective against the Church of England and its ministers.

'The service of God, who is truth, her liturgy confesses to be perfect freedom; but her works and her opinions declare that the service of prelaty is perfect slavery, and by consequence perfect falsehood; which makes me wonder much that many of the gentry, studious men, as I hear, should engage themselves to write, and speak publicly in her defence; but that I believe their honest and ingenuous natures, coming to the universities to store them-



selves with good and solid learning, and there unfortunately fed with nothing else but the scragged and thorny lectures of monkish and miserable sophistry, were sent home again with such a scholastical bur in their throats, as hath stopped and hindered all true and generous philosophy from entering, cracked their voices for ever with metaphysical gargarisms, and hath made them admire a sort of formal outside men, prelatically addicted, whose unchastened and unwrought minds were never yet initiated or subdued under the true lore of religion or moral virtue, which two are the best and greatest points of learning, but either slightly trained up in a kind of hypocritical and hackney course of literature to get their living by, and dazzle the ignorant, or else fondly overstudied in useless controversies, except those which they use with all the specious and delusive subtlety they are able, to defend their prelatial Sparta, having a gospel and church government set before their eyes, as a fair field wherein they might exercise the greatest virtues and the greatest deeds of christian authority, in mean fortunes and little furniture of this world; which even the sage heathen writers, and those old Fabricii and Curii well knew to be a manner of working, than which nothing could liken a mortal man more to God, who delights most to work from within himself, and not by the heavy luggage of corporeal instruments; they understand it not, and think no such matter, but admire and dote upon worldly riches and honors, with an easy and intemperate life, to the bane of Christianity; yea, they and their seminaries shame not to profess, to petition, and never leave pealing our ears, that unless we fat them like boars, and cram them as they list with wealth, with deaneries and pluralities, with baronies and stately preferments, all learning and religion will go under foot; which is such a shameless, such a bestial plea, and of that odious impudence in churchmen, who should be to us a pattern of temperance and frugal mediocrity, who should teach us to condemn this world, and the gaudy things thereof, according to the promise which they themselves require from us in baptism, that should the scripture stand by and be mute, there is not that sect of philosophers among the heathen so dissolute, no not Epicurus, nor Aristippus with all his Cyrenaic rout, but would shut his schooldoors against such greasy sophisters; not any college of mountebanks, but would think scorn to discover in themselves, with such a brazen forehead, the outrageous desire of filthy lucre, which the prelates make so little conscience of, that they are ready to fight, and if it lay in their power, to massacre all good Christians, under the names of horrible schismatics, for only finding fault with their temporal dignities, their unconscionable wealth and revenues, their cruel authority over their brethren





that labor in the word, while they snore in their luxurious excess, openly proclaiming themselves now in the sight of all men, to be those which for a while they sought to cover under sheep's clothing, ravenous and savage wolves, threatening inroads and bloody incursions upon the flock of Christ, which they took upon them to feed, but now claim to devour as their prey; more like that huge dragon of Egypt, breathing out waste and desolation to the land, unless he were daily fattened with virgin's blood. Vol. i. pp. 177—179.

We should not be surprised, if this proved to be one of the longest periods on record. Such a tax upon patience is hardly to be borne, and not to be paid without a serious protest.

But to return for a moment to the more important topic of Milton's opinions. They were evidently in advance of the age,—too much so to be generally received. They are even now in advance of the world, and for a long time to come, perhaps, will continue to be so. On the subjects of toleration, religious liberty, civil and political rights, education, and the duties and prospects of men, he will forever be on an equal line with the most improved age; for he marched forward at once to the utmost boundary of truth. His treatise on the 'Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,' notwithstanding the side which it takes, is in its whole tendency favorable to purity and virtue. The domestic unhappiness with which he himself was afflicted, led him to consider this subject, and no doubt had its influence on his views of it. He convinced himself, and endeavored to convince others, that divorce should be granted on the grounds of opposition of sentiments, habits, temper, and feelings between the parties. But with whatever learning and fervor and skill he maintained this opinion, the convictions of the wisest, most virtuous, and most liberal of mankind have been decidedly against it, and have pronounced it false. We look on this instance as a remarkable proof of the grand principle which pervades all his works, that truth will at last prevail. It has prevailed over eloquence like his.

We quit the subject of this article with reluctance. But we have only time again to recommend Mr Jenks's Selection to the public. It contains several of Milton's treatises entire, and all that is valuable, either for style or sentiment, in the rest. It is confined to his English prose only; as the object of the editor was 'to make the English reader better acquainted with Milton's own prose, not the prose of any translator.' The



Selection is prefaced by a historical account, exceedingly well drawn up, of his works, both English and Latin; and further to bespeak general favor for these two volumes, we would remark that they afford to the reader, for the moderate price of three dollars, what he could not otherwise obtain for ten times the sum.

---

ART. V.—1. *Manifiesto que el Poder Ejecutivo de Colombia presenta a la Republica, y al Mundo sobre los Acontecimientos de Venezuela, desde el 30 de Abril del presente Año de 1826—16.* Bogotá. 1826.

2. *Documento Curioso sobre los Acontecimientos de Venezuela, etc. Carta Confidencial del Vice-presidente de la Republica al Jeneral José Antonio Paez.* Bogotá. 1826.

3. *Respuesta del Jeneral Paez a la Carta Confidencial, que le dirigio el Vice-presidente de la Republica, etc.* Bogotá. 1826.

4. *Ejecucion del Decreto del Poder Ejecutivo, para Alistamiento en las Milicias, que motivó la Acusacion del Jeneral en Jefe José Antonio Paez, ante el Senado.* Valencia. 1826.

MEN are prone to magnify objects removed far back in the mists of antiquity, and to ascribe undue consequence to those incidents, which have acquired historical celebrity. It was the just observation of a classic author, *Quòd naturaliter audita visis laudamus libentiùs, et præsentia invidiâ, præterita veneratione prosequimur.* Were it not so, we should certainly attach higher importance to many events actually taking place; events, which must render our day as much the object of deep interest to posterity as ages gone by are to ourselves. There is no period in the history of man without its memorable vicissitudes, full of instruction,—its marked individual, a Cæsar, Washington, Bonaparte, or Bolivar, towering like a beacon above the ever rolling tide of time, and seeming ordained to fulfil an extraordinary destiny. Why regard the monuments of the past so intently as to forget that we ourselves already stand recorded in the book of fate, and to overlook the striking features of our own brief hour? The progress of



PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE  
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

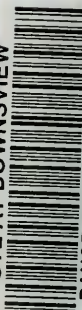
---

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

---

PR	Greenwood, Francis William
3581	Pitt
G74	Milton's English prose works

UTL AT DOWNSVIEW



D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C  
39 14 13 11 09 017 6